

Race Suicide

BY M. P. DOWLING, S.J.

THE subject which we propose to discuss under this title has engaged the attention of the thinking men of our country for many years. The grave offense it connotes against morality and social order has been aptly described by Colonel Roosevelt as race suicide. Some thoughtless people have made those two words a target for sneer and ridicule, have held up to contempt those who agree with the views of the ex-President, but in their hearts the great mass of God-fearing persons admit that there is in what the phrase stigmatizes, an imminent danger to society. I take up this matter, not as a theologian laying down canons of virtue, not as a preacher declaiming against sin, not as a prophet foretelling dire things to the guilty and repeating the forceful phrase of Nathan to David, "Thou art the man," but as a well-wisher of our race reluctantly treating a grave social problem and trying to solve it according to well-established Christian principles. Those who most need to take the matter to heart will probably regard the subject as on a par with fashion or dress or some other foible; and they will consider that any man who deliberately selects such a topic for public discussion deserves to be laughed at for his pains. Let us see if they are justified in dealing with the matter so disdainfully.

In the beginning God made human kind to His image and likeness. He did more: He divided this type and created man and woman. Then He blessed the parents

of our race, saying "Increase and multiply." This was not a commandment requiring all to marry, but a benediction rendering the human race fruitful and showing the end for which marriage was instituted; for He said the same to the birds and fishes which, being irrational, were incapable of receiving any precept.

It is in consequence of this blessing on living creatures that we witness the profusion of being that is revealed by modern science as extending so far into the realms of life that numbers fail to picture to the imagination the species and the individuals. Animalcula so small that millions may exist in a drop of water, are not as was once supposed, mere living specks of organized matter, but beings endowed with perfect form, possessing, like the higher animals, organs of sight, muscles, nerves, teeth, a physical structure as wonderful as that of a huge elephant which swallows them by millions of millions in a single mouthful of water. The soil supporting our forests, the quarries out of which our edifices are built are in many instances vast cemeteries made up of microscopic remains of little beings, millions of which would fill but a cubic inch of space.

Now, if God wishes this multiplication of beings, expressing so imperfectly His life and perfections, how can He be indifferent to the propagation of beings created to His image and likeness? It is because He is not indifferent that He desired the human race to increase and multiply and fill the earth. In response to His blessing they have gone on increasing till their numbers escape all accurate calculation, till we can judge only approximately the number of human beings on the face of the earth, and are content to say that it is about fifteen hundred millions. He wishes this multiplication among

pagans and infidels and savages, because even they preserve some relic of their grand origin and noble destiny, because they still reflect the Divine image; that is enough, God wills it. Can He be indifferent to the propagation of Christian families which, by Baptism, have a second time received the image of their Maker?

At three different epochs in human history, the Creator made known His will. Just as to the first man, He said: "Increase and multiply," so a thousand years later to the second father of humanity, to Noe, and to his sons, He spoke a pregnant word, and it bore the same burden, "Increase and multiply and fill the earth"; for so we read in Genesis. Still another thousand years rolled on and the same blessing was repeated, for the word of the Lord came to Abraham: "Fear not; I am thy protector and thy reward exceeding great." The patriarch answered: "What wilt Thou give me; behold, I have no child." Then God brought him forth out of the tent, saying: "Look up to the heavens and number the stars, if thou canst; so shall thy seed be." The reward of Abraham's faith is paternity.

And after that, from Abraham to the last of the prophets, text on text and example after example, confirm the doctrine that children are the blessing of marriage, no matter what the new gospel of selfishness may proclaim. In the Old Testament curse alternates with blessing: "He who is blessed shall be a father, the cursed shall stand alone." If it is said to the just, "Thy wife shall be like a fruitful vine," (*Ps. 127*); to the wicked man and the sinner comes the sentence, "In a single generation his name will be blotted out." (*Ps. 108*).

The New Law introduces no change into the character of the blessing on marriage. "She shall be saved through

child-bearing," says St. Paul (*I Tim.* ii: 15), "if she continue in love and faith and sanctification." And of widows, he says in the same Epistle (5, 14): "I will, therefore, that the younger should marry, bear children, be mistresses of families, give no occasion to the adversary to speak evil." The Church renews and promulgates this doctrine, when at the nuptial ceremony she prays that the bride "May be amiable to her husband like Rachel, wise like Rebecca, long-lived and faithful like Sara, may she be fruitful in offspring, and may they both see their children's children to the third and fourth generation . . ." Beyond a doubt, fecundity is to be considered a precious gift and inheritance for the married.

God said: "Increase and multiply"; man says: "Let us fear to increase and multiply; the earth might become too narrow; the fewer there are to share the good things of life the more there will be for each." So spoke the sages in the little world of Greece and the great world of Rome, when man lived for the State and never thought of his eternal destiny. They considered yearly wars and frequent epidemics the precious correctives of an exaggerated multiplication of the human species. Being at a loss to rid themselves of the surplus population, they did not hesitate to throttle the ill-formed infant in the name of Lycurgus, if, indeed, they consented to allow it to open its eyes at all to the light of day.

But a time came when alarming symptoms revealed themselves and a profound evil manifested itself to the world. They had been afraid that they might become too numerous, and now, behold! they dare not count their numbers, through fear of finding out how few they were. It became necessary to retrace their steps, to affirm the contrary of what they had hitherto proclaimed as the

law of progress, to acknowledge that the misuse of marriage can have no blessing even among a pagan people, that nations inevitably witness the decay of their wealth, their strength and their prosperity, when a decadent family spirit is allowed to undermine the legitimate growth of population. But the new exhortations of the sages did not enjoy the same credit as the old, and laws had to be passed to sustain and make them efficacious. We read with surprise the laws of Augustus intended to discourage abstinence from marriage and to promote the fruitfulness of matrimony. The unmarried were relegated to the last place in the theaters, the circuses and the plays: no inconsiderable penalty when we reflect how much the shows absorbed of the Roman's day and life. In the deliberations of the senate the unmarried gave their opinions last. Everywhere the first place was given to the married man, and he that had most children ranked above the others. By a still more stringent law the celibate could inherit only from his father and mother; he could not receive a legacy or inheritance by will. The law took from him what was his by right of succession and handed it over to his married relative, because it had become fashionable to be burdened with few children in the state of wedlock or out of it. That was the final outcome of pagan morality, and it must ever be the same when only the selfish instincts of mankind are heeded. This is always the way when the law established by the Creator is abandoned for the law of selfishness, when human providence supplants the Divine.

When Christianity at length became mistress of the world she overturned these false ideas of morality and national progress. But after the lapse of centuries a new paganism undertook to assert itself in the name of

reason, and the same wicked principles once more revived. They were followed, however, by the same condign punishment as before, and men saw the necessity of retracing their steps. All this happened within a little more than a century past. "Excessive population must be prudently checked": this was the watchword of the world reformers. England charged herself with the task of giving this doctrine a scientific form. For fifty years there were few books of any importance wherein this formula was not found cited or incidentally recalled. Whether the book treated of commerce, politics, industry, agriculture, medicine, navigation, under some pretense or other, place was found for this axiom: "The population of a State must be prudently calculated and restricted." This theory was placed, too, on the high intellectual plane of national and social well-being, and reasoned out according to the principles of political economy, called by some the "dismal science." Malthus, in his book entitled "Principles of Population as It Affects the Future Improvement of Society," gave the impetus to the movement. He held that the population of the earth increases more rapidly than the means of subsistence, because population advances almost in a geometrical proportion, as two, four, eight, sixteen, while the fertility of the land increases approximately only in an arithmetical proportion, as one, two, three, four, five and so on. Hence, the continually increasing population must eventually exceed the capacity of the earth to supply food. What is the conclusion? The increase of human kind must be prudently checked. The only preventive check recognized by Malthus himself was that no man should marry till he could support a family; but others taking up his contention, that undue growth of population is an inevitable

and all but insurmountable cause of poverty and misery, drew inferences he would have repudiated. Unconsciously they abandoned the field of political economy and set themselves up as authoritative teachers of morality, which in their hands assumed a pagan bias. Population must be held back, not merely by restraint of the reproductive faculty, but by means that do not fall short of actual murder. The theory was worked out so as to convince the poor that squalid abodes, low wages, inability to find employment, want and wretchedness, were not the result of misgovernment, intemperance, absence of thrift and a hundred other removable causes, but that all the ills of humanity were due to the fact that there are too many people in the world. Hence, decrease the number by fair means or foul, and put a stop to that continual division of wealth, which is ineffectual, because property is subject to influences as inexorable as the law of gravitation. If the man born into the world is unable to obtain subsistence from his parents, and society has no need of his labor, he has no claim to the smallest portion of food and he has no business in the world. This theory practically addressed the masses thus: "There are too many of you. There is no place for you at the banquet of life; at nature's mighty feast there is no cover for you, and society has no need of your children."

This is the gospel of greed, making man an offering on the counter of selfishness. It must be very comforting to the few who monopolize the good things of life, for it says to them: "You are not to blame for the misery festering a block away from your mansions, or groaning in a hovel in the alley behind your barn; it is the fault of the poor; why do they increase?" And so Dives would be justified in shutting out the vision of Lazarus lying at his door.

But the facts are against the theory that the earth is inadequate to support the growth of population. The United States, even with the wasteful methods of farming now in vogue, could feed hundreds of millions. Under different conditions even little Ireland would be capable of supporting three times its present population. Brazil, Peru, Mexico have room for teeming millions within their borders. Portions of the dark continent of Africa were once densely peopled; so was Asia Minor; and they might become garden spots of the earth once more. There is still plenty of elbow room on the globe.

New discoveries and inventions give birth to new industries and new methods of breadwinning; even the increase of luxury and wastefulness, the pursuit of new pleasures bring about the same result. Apparent misfortunes, like the great Chicago fire, plant the seeds of immense stockyards, a wilderness of skyscrapers, acres of elevators, hundreds of miles of city and suburban railways, water, gas and steam pipes, electric lights twinkling in the night like stardust, factories, shops and steamers without number. All this is the natural order of development, without any recourse to the guiding hand of a special Providence, which never forgets and abandons its countless children. God makes no mistakes, and for every soul He creates and infuses into a mortal body, He furnishes what is needful for its well-being. History may be reviewed in vain for an instance of any considerable country wherein poverty and want can be fairly traced to the increase of the number of mouths beyond the power of the accompanying hands to fill them. In most cases they can, more properly, be attributed to unjust laws, misgovernment, destructive warfare, decadent commerce, a disregard of the Divine law, vice and crime.

But man will not allow himself to be treated with such contempt as these theories put upon him when they make him only the chattel of the favored classes. Neglect him, tremble before him, shudder at him, hate him, fawn upon him, corrupt him, but beware of treating him as a brute, even in the name of Malthus. He will resent it and rebel against it in virtue of the old gospel, far dearer to him than the new, because it recognized his human dignity.

Political economy has been singularly unfortunate in its successive invasions of the domain of morality. When it undertakes to usurp the place of religion and lay down canons of virtue and vice, it always meets with signal discomfiture. For a long time its point of departure was this: see what the Catholic Church holds on the subject, and you will be infallibly right in maintaining the contrary. This was called substituting reason for revelation, nature for superstition. Wherever it saw misery and want it considered it its solemn duty to blot them out. Before the eighteenth century it saw misery and rashly concluded it was due to insufficient population. At once it pronounced its anathemas on celibacy; no celibacy; it is unnatural, unscriptural, immoral; no priests, no nuns, no monasticism; you would think that the human race was doomed to extinction if every man and woman did not marry offhand and rear offspring. It soon learned its folly. Notwithstanding its diatribes and in spite of its advice, misery did not disappear. So, after trying in vain to stamp out voluntary celibacy, the celibacy of virtue, in the name of liberty, equality and fraternity, it undertook to substitute a celibacy of force and selfishness. And this is the particular zone or sphere of influence in which we still find ourselves today.

I turn to the unhappy land of France for a moral, a lesson and a solemn warning of the consequences of trampling on the law of God. I find them all in the consular reports of the United States for July, 1891. There is abundant food for thought. Consul Knowles, of Bordeaux, sounded the note of alarm in his paper on the depopulation of France, written apropos of an address delivered by Dr. Lagneau, of Paris, before the Academy of Medicine. This address was, at that time, the talk of Paris and the entire nation. The topic is not a new one, says Mr. Knowles. Charpentier had frequently called the attention of his fellow-citizens to the appalling decrease in their country's birth-rate. Statisticians, scientists, political economists, hygienists and *litterateurs* joined periodically in one grand chorus urging the sterner sex to a more conscientious and patriotic fulfilment of the obligations of life, exhorting them, in short, to present the State with more sons and daughters. Not long before the official journal had given its readers some very interesting statistics about the annual decrease in the population and the extremely serious condition of affairs that has long been hovering like some frightful nightmare over the French people. The writer of the article does not hesitate to assert that, unless some immediate change takes place, the French nation will, in a comparatively short space of time, be extinct. The decrease is neither gradual nor interrupted; the array of figures at first glance looks like a succession of bad crops. He asks what is to be done; the problem awaits solution. He answers that as far as nature herself is concerned, she has since the creation, taken the wisest and most practical precautions for the conservation of the species, and that alarmed savants have nothing to ask of her, since

it is evident that the root of the evil lies with the Gallic race. If, however, the remedies to be applied are as numerous as the theories propounded, their proper administration will form a science in itself. A certain set in the French Academy of Medicine claim that the decrease in the birth-rate is due to the existence of diseases difficult to name, whereas, their fellow-members assure us that these diseases are less prevalent in France than in any other civilized countries; and statistics seem to confirm the statement. Some condemn late marriages and attribute to them the present condition of affairs; others oppose early marriages. Evidently, these gentlemen will have to convene and determine upon the proper age. France is preeminently a country of taxation. There is a tax on life, a tax on death and a tax on existence in general, in order to support a large standing army. It was proposed, on a number of occasions, to temper taxation in proportion to the number of children in the family of the taxpayer; to make the father of seven children entirely exempt from taxation; the father of six children liable for one-seventh of the tax, and so on in an inverse ratio to the number of children. To make up for the deficiency of revenue resulting from this system, a tax would be levied on bachelors, increased year by year in direct proportion to other ages; thus offering a continual incentive to matrimony. So it is that history repeats itself, when we fall back on pagan ideals. Thus, it will be seen that the fears of Malthus regarding the reproductive power of man and the geometrical increase of the race have no terrors whatever for the French, who take no chances in the matter; it cannot even be said that these disquieting apprehensions form an acute problem in any part of the world. If the whole

affair were not so deeply tragic, it would be laughable to see the various causes for depopulation seriously assigned in official reports. Rochard, for instance, divides his paper into ten separate heads, five of which are seriously taken up in support of the theory that smallpox and varioloid are prime factors in the depletion of the population. Vaccination is recommended in order to remedy the evil. This shows how foolishly the wise men of France are misdirecting their energies and how complacent their self-deception. Smallpox is no more prevalent in that country than in any other; it is a side issue not worth discussing, except by local boards of health and pseudo-philosophers who fear to turn their eyes on the ruins made by their folly.

All this in singular contrast with the fecundity of the same race beyond the seas. The French-Canadians who have not been infected with the virus of unbelief, increased from 70,000, in 1760, to 2,000,000 in 1887, or about twenty-seven times in 127 years. They must have been astonishingly exempt from smallpox and the other diseases affecting their countrymen at home, where the increase was only one-sixth in the entire century, or 160 times less than among the French-Canadians.

Now, let us cross the Canadian border to the United States, and see what confronts us. Our census for 1870 showed some startling results. The births from lawful wedlock had decreased so alarmingly in one section of the country that a sturdy race, whose history was writ large in the annals of human progress, seemed doomed to extinction. The revelations were such as to call for a special article by the director-general of the census, and they were discussed warmly by thoughtful men throughout the land, as an evil portent for the native-

born, and pointing to the ultimate ascendancy of the Germans, the Irish and the Slavs. Such disappointment must ever come when human providence usurps the place of the Divine.

The same story is repeated in the metropolis of our country. Some years ago a New York paper sprang a veritable sensation in the form of an article giving a canvass of the number of children under ten years of age, as well as the number born within a year, in 300 families living on Fifth Avenue, the most fashionable locality in the city and the abode of "the 400"; and the same statistics in the case of 300 families on Cherry Hill, noted for its mixtures of all classes and conditions of society. The result certainly justified the significant headlines of the article: "What Would Become of the Republic, if Fifth Avenue was Its Only Hope?" The total number of children under ten years of age among the Fifth Avenue 300 was ninety-one, as against 660 on Cherry Hill. The total number born to the Fifth Avenue 200 during the previous year, was six, against 111 for Cherry Hill.

There is no escaping the fact that the future of our republic is in the hands of those who rear families, for the child of today is the citizen, the law-giver and the ruler of tomorrow. It is passing strange that the prudential check originally invoked in behalf of the poor, and recommended to those who have not the wherewith to support a family, has latterly been applied chiefly in favor of those who are in a position to rear sturdy sons and daughters, who are best fitted to be the bulwark of the nation. Can it be possible that wealth is the natural enemy of infancy and childhood? And is the instinct of reproduction weaker in the privileged classes, the spirit

of self-denial more pronounced? Is it not rather that large families are looked upon with disdain as a plebeian institution, entailing too much sacrifice, debarring the mother from many pleasures she is unwilling to forego? Is it not because every new birth requires the expense account to be overhauled, several chapters of travel to be blotted out, transfers to be made to the side of the nurse and the governess, balls and parties and receptions to be given up?

People sin today by excessive prudence. If families are growing smaller, it is not because there is less natural fruitfulness; if the births do not keep pace with the deaths, it is not because men and women are attracted by a life of voluntary chastity or are deeply in love with the Evangelical Counsels; but because the designs of God are frustrated by the prosperous classes; and that a period of moral decay is begun. It is because the warm stream of infant life is kept back. It is because instead of guardian spirits parents become the exterminating angels of their offspring. In rigorous simplicity of language, it must be said that too many are engaged in a systematic and deliberate opposition to God, in as far as they can thwart His designs and impede His providential dispensations. Practically, they say to Him: "Let us make a compact; in the law You place before me are certain things which I accept; but the consequences I decline; I will embrace pleasure but reject duty; what agrees with my inclinations and the ideas and decrees of contemporary society, I will obey, but I will carry no cross, make no sacrifices."

But what can be gained by contending against Omnipotence? The Almighty has infinite resources at His command to defeat those who rise up against Him. The

punishment will come when least expected, and it will come in such a way as to wring the very fibers of humanity. It will come in the form of ruined health and undermined constitutions, which will invoke in vain the skill of physicians and surgeons. It will come when the single child permitted to enter into the world is snatched away like a delicate flower whose fragrant life was all too short for joy. It will come, when bereft in age, the husband and wife sit lonely by the fireside, with no kindred lips to kiss their faded cheeks and warm them at the fires of love. It will come when they feel that they have wasted their years and substance, that they have played no part in the drama of life, which for them has been a failure, that they have contributed nothing to the race and have moved like ghosts in the energizing world of living men and women.

These considerations do not apply to those Christian spouses from whom, through no fault or wavering trust on their part, God has withheld the offspring for which they yearn and the answering love of childhood sprung from their own lives. For to them has been reserved another ministry; the poor and the afflicted; the widow and the orphan, the disinherited of fortune are their family. Mankind has been committed to their keeping and handed over to their love. When will men learn that the infusion of a soul belongs to God, that parents are but co-contributors to human life, and that if God did not will fruitfulness, they might plead in vain for offspring, or only win it after long and earnest prayer, as did Anna, the mother of Samuel the prophet.

According to Christian teaching, there is a two-fold Providence in the institution of marriage, one is to perpetuate the species on earth, the other to fill heaven with

the substitutes for the fallen Angels. The first is natural, the second supernatural Providence. In the light of that two-fold Providence what a grand mission opens out before the parent! Just as of old the spirit of God moved over the face of the deep, and made a splendid creation leap forth from dark and barren chaos; just as he separated light from darkness and planted in the firmament the illuminating stars, so the parents soar over the being sprung from themselves and destined for so noble an end. Under their fostering hands darkness is dissipated, harmonies of good rise out of chaos, grand ideas, the stars of the soul, mount up to the firmament of thought, and man is created because his soul lives. Thus are renewed the marvels of the first days of creation, when God wrought his mysteries of power. Will no account be asked if this sacred deposit of duty be squandered, if the treasures of God's house and love have been wasted, if the jewels of God's crown have been lost? And will not the wailing cry of the Roman emperor, "Varus, where are my legions; Varus, give me back my lost legions," find their counterpart in the reproachful language addressed to quickened consciences by the Creator of mankind?

Throughout the whole land, among all ranks and conditions of fortune, the dread of an increase in the family looms up like a presage of evil. This manner of thinking is not only common but in certain circles all but universal. And this view of duty is abetted by the physician, who gives the advice he knows will be acceptable, when he tells the halting wife that another child would spell death for her; by the doting mother who instructs her newly wedded daughter how to avoid the sorrows and trials of maternity; by the itinerant vender of immoral

literature which teaches the young more evil than their parents ever knew.

The doctrine of the Church on this subject is epitomized and condensed in the seventh chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, by the same Apostle who calls marriage a great sacrament, and in the beginning of the same chapter teaches the rights and duties of the married more plainly than any preacher of today would venture to do, concluding his instructions by reminding them that what he tells them is by way of indulgence, and not a commandment.

Divorce, also, enters as an abettor of race suicide. I have never been able to understand why so much outcry has been raised against polygamy by the same persons who regard divorce as permissible. Polygamy exists only in a single remote territory, yet all eyes are turned upon that evil, while comparatively little attention is paid to a still more crying evil spread over the whole land and weakening the marriage-bond even to the snapping point. Is there any difference between the two, but that one is simultaneous and the other successive polygamy? Both must be condemned, because God has forbidden them; but I do not hesitate to affirm that of the two polygamy is less opposed to the natural law than divorce, for instead of frustrating, it promotes the primary end of marriage, which is the continuation of human life on earth. I must be pardoned if, in this matter, I fall back on Christian principles, for I cannot see how one who rejects them can logically oppose polygamy. Deny God and assert unlimited liberty, and where is the wrong of polygamy? Why should not a man have all the wives he wishes, if there is no God and no moral law to forbid it? That plague spot on the body politic can never be removed by

infidel principles, and it is only to Christian sentiment and tradition that the unbeliever appeals for its destruction, when he comes between men and women to limit the extent of selection.

It is frequently said to Catholics: "Don't you see that your doctrine on divorce is too hard and rigorous, that you do not take into account the weakness and inconstancy of human nature? You require sacrifices above the strength of man; it is cruel to subject the most tender affections to the rigor of a principle, to rivet together two lives when there is no longer mutual love. When you answer these two beings, longing for separation, with an eternal *never*, you forget all the rules of prudence and provoke despair." And thus divorce has its votaries and apologists and courtiers in the pulpit, the press, the legal and medical professions, like troubadours of love chanting the praises of a new divinity.

Now observe the process by which public opinion is formed in favor of the severance of family ties. Here are the ingredients: brutal and besotted husband; faithful, beautiful and intellectual wife; jealousy, cruelty, neglect, incompatibility. Collect a half-dozen harrowing cases, true or false, represent circumstances absolutely exceptional as habitual and inevitable; studiously keep in the background the corrigible faults, such as diabolical temper, of which one or both parties may be guilty. Throw in a few stereotyped expressions about the irresistible law of love, the crime of doing violence to affection, sacred impulses before which all must bow; speak of obeying the organization given by nature: insist on the legitimate maladies of the soul. Mix all these well, with a dash of sentimentality about womanhood, blasted lives, some little inquisition, rack, thumbscrews, a few piteous

appeals to feeling, the tyranny of riveting chains on humanity—and *presto fides, pass!* here is your argument for divorce fresh and ready from the hands of the magician! What makes this process of breaking family ties perfidious is that the possibility of separation, without permission being given to either party, and especially the guilty one, to marry again, is never suggested; yet a mere separation fills all the requirements in every case and is precisely the course needed today, when divorces uniformly have in view a new marriage. "Very well," you will say, "the parties are freed from the punishment of living together; but if you forbid them to contract a new alliance, you prevent them from gratifying another passion that their hearts concealed and which may have been the cause of the disgust, unhappiness and discord experienced in the first union. Why not let the parties free, and permit them to follow the feelings of their hearts?"

Here is where the Church shows her deep knowledge of human nature and wins her most signal triumph, while enforcing the law of God. There is a passion in the heart of man exerting a powerful influence on the destinies of his life, often forging chains of misfortune and anguish. This passion has for its object the preservation of the race and it is found in some form in every living being. In brutes it is an instinct; in man it is a passion, inconstant and capricious, because enlivened by the imagination and prone to follow the tortuous path of the free will. It may be the restlessness of fever, the frenzy of madness, the tenderness of love.

There are two ways of dealing with this, as with all other passions, compliance and resistance. According to the first, the passion is yielded to as it advances; an invincible obstacle is never opposed to it; it is never left

without hope; a barrier is erected, but with the understanding that if you put your foot upon it, the limit will recede; everything proceeds on the assumption that passion is weakened by indulgence. In the system of resistance, the line is fixed and immovable, on every side there is a wall of brass, nowhere a shadow of hope; the principle that opposes will never change or compromise.

The Church follows the second system. There is an inexorable check to passion at the first step, no hope is given of the dissolution of the marriage tie, a Divine seal consecrates it absolutely and irrevocably, no exception is possible. Passion rages for a while, but when it finds the barrier insurmountable, it soon accommodates itself, and like the angry waves of the sea, falls back at the limit marked out by the Divine law; peace is secured to family, protection to the children of holy wedlock. Once the parties understand that they must live together, or at least can never hope to marry while the life-partner is living, they learn to soften by mutual accommodation the yoke they cannot shake off, they become good husbands and wives by the very necessity of remaining husbands and wives.

It were folly to disguise the truth that the decay of the family precedes and precipitates the decay of the nation; two ruins salute each other, two deaths are linked together. The same pens that have given so dark a picture of pagan society, have also traced the unspeakable degradation of the family. The nation that has Christian families to fall back upon need have no fear of the future, for in the hour of trial and danger she has stalwart sons to defend her. When she needs souls to sustain her and make sacrifices for her, they come trooping forth from the Christian home.

Yet, when we have said all that we can say, and marshaled arguments that are invincible, we have not accomplished much, unless men and women take to heart the lesson taught them by history and religion as well as by experience. It is not argument that is needed; it is self-sacrifice and a sense of duty. We must get back to Christian principles and mold Christian lives, till the humblest sees that life is not all for pleasure, self-ease and enjoyment, that duty and conscience must play a great part and march in the vanguard of true progress.

A Very Old Problem

By ERNEST R. HULL, S.J.

To the Editor of the Bombay "Examiner":

By the fact that God knows all that happens and will happen in this world, as it happens only by His permission, no man can attempt to commit good deeds when once God has permitted him to commit evil ones. Why then does God create a man when he knows that that man's destination is not to go to heaven?

THE same old question, always turning up again, just as if it had never been answered before! It is quite untrue that "no man can attempt to do good deeds when God has permitted him to do evil ones." God has given man free will, which He never takes away from him. He also offers grace to every man to do good deeds and to avoid evil ones. There is never a moment in a man's life when he is unable to avoid sin if he likes. This is made clear by the fact that if a man is unable to avoid

sin, *it ceases to be sin*. That is to say, as soon as a man loses his power of free choice, he is no longer responsible for his actions, and they do not count against him as sin.

Think well on that point, and you have half the solution of your difficulty. Then take the second point, which is this. God's foreknowledge of what is going to happen does not *cause* anything to happen. It does not make the least difference to the course of events, which would go on just the same even if God knew nothing about the future. Thus a man called Higgins is going to commit a murder tomorrow. God knows it beforehand; but it would happen just the same if God did not know it. God only knows what will happen because it is going to happen. His knowledge does not cause it to happen.

Take an illustration from ordinary life. A terrible accident happened on the G. I. P. Railway recently, because (so it is reported) an assistant station-master gave "line clear" when it was not clear. Supposing the explanation is true, it is manifest that the station-master acted freely. He could give line clear if he liked, or he could refuse to give it. Well and good. Now suppose by some mysterious means I possessed the powers of reading that man's mind. I should see beforehand what he would do, and could prophesy the accident. It is clear that my foreknowledge of that station-master's action would not *cause* him to act that way. It merely pictures beforehand what he was going to do. Even if I had *not* foreseen it, it would have happened all the same. My foreknowledge does not make the least difference to the course of events.

But there will be an objection here. You will argue: "It is all very well for *you* to foresee; but perhaps your foresight might prove wrong. The man might at the

last moment change his mind, and act just the opposite way. Clearly *your* foreknowledge would not fix his action, because it is human and fallible. But *God's* knowledge is infallible. If He foresees a thing it simply *must* happen, otherwise God would be deceived. Hence it looks as if God's foreknowledge did fix human action."

There is no doubt that we are here bangup against a puzzle. We simply cannot understand *how* God can know things which have not yet happened. However this is only part of the mystery of knowledge in general. We do not know how anybody can know *anything at all*. How can a man see *red*? It is no answer to reply that certain vibrations strike the eye. How does a man hear music? It is no answer to say that sound-waves strike the ear. How does an intellect see that five multiplied by six will give thirty? It is no answer to say that he has put them together and counted the result; the question is, how *can* he put them together, and how can he count the result? We cannot explain how a man, seeing a cause, can foresee its effect; or how a man can conceive a machine as *possible*, and then proceed to manufacture it. Think deeply over this and you will find yourself in a hopeless bog; and the deeper the thought, the deeper the bog.

When we pass from a finite mind to an infinite mind, the mystery becomes worse and worse. How can God, who is infinitely simple, think of things so complicated as the world? How can he choose out of an infinite number of possible worlds, and create that one instead of any other? How can God arrange the world so that from simple beginnings, it shall evolve into a complex system? How can God see beforehand what it will evolve into, or what it will be like when it is evolved? We cannot even

answer such comparatively easy questions as these. Now comes the final crux: How can God foresee future events, which are not fixed like the sequences of nature, but are free and contingent, and depend on the arbitrary free choice of man, who can change his mind and will at any moment? The answer is: We have not the least idea *how* it can happen. But we know, with the certainty both of faith and reason, that God *must* know everything which is knowable. He must possess complete knowledge *always*, and never stands in need of learning anything new. We know that in God there is neither past nor future, but that He is one Eternal Now. "Like a man standing on a tower of eternity, he sees all finite persons and things moving by. Some of them are passing the tower, some have passed it, and some are approaching it. But to the watchman on the tower they are all equally present. He can see them, and know them all at once, though they themselves come one after another."

That is St. Thomas's way of illustrating the idea, and it certainly helps the imagination, though it does not explain the *how*. An application of the picture to our present point may be added: As the watchman, seeing the various objects coming towards the tower, does not cause them to come, but merely witnesses their coming, so God seeing the actions which a man will do in the future, does not cause them to come but merely observes them as they are coming. Future actions will not occur because God foresees them, God foresees them merely because they will occur.